

Lake County News Sun, August 26, 2008

It was a rough year for beach closings along Lake Michigan, but Lake County officials say a recent environmental group's report overstates the problem of poor water quality.

The National Resource Defense Council released its 18th annual report on the state of public beaches and urged passage of the Beach Protection Act (Senate Bill 2844) to boost water-quality monitoring and pollution tracking for beaches throughout the country. The Beach Act overwhelmingly passed the U.S. House in April, but is stalled in the Senate.

#### Beach alerts

To receive alerts about beach closings, sign up at [Earth911.org](http://Earth911.org) . Participants will receive an e-mail each time the status of a beach has changed.

According to the council's report, beach safety advisories were up 34 percent in Illinois in 2007. These numbers do not include inland beaches. While Illinois had the highest percent exceedances in the nation in 2007, sampling frequency for Great Lakes beaches are among the highest in the nation.

Mike Adams, the Lake County Health Department's senior biologist, said that is the part of the study that is causing the most commentary. He said it's easy to have fewer exceedances with less testing. Lake County tests a lot and is likely to have more exceedances, he said.

"I don't think it paints a true picture of what's going on. In Michigan, they monitor a couple of times a month, so there are less exceedances," Adams said.

They also use Swimcast, which can predict when it is likely that the E. coli bacteria will exceed

standards because of rainfall or the direction of the wind. Three beaches on Lake Michigan have that technology.

"That way, we keep people out of the water when they are supposed to be out of the water," Adams said, explaining that regular tests have a time lapse before they are complete so the beach is open when it shouldn't be.

Lake County had three beaches in the top 10 of exceedances: North Point Marina North Beach, Waukegan South Beach, and Naval Station Great Lakes' Nunn Beach.

Most of the E. coli bacteria recorded at beaches comes from seagull waste.

The county has put up signs warning residents not to feed the gulls in an attempt to reduce the number of gulls at beaches.

Adams also said that heavy rains last August led to an unusual amount of beach closings.

He said the Health Department is also looking into infrastructure problems along the north shore, where a number of ravines lead to the lake. Small sewer leaks can elevate E. coli counts.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, urged passage of the Beach Protection Act at a press conference Monday at Chicago's Shedd Aquarium.

"It's important because it's the source of our drinking water and makes up a good part of recreation in the summertime," he said.

Kirk said the bill will require the Environmental Protection Agency to tighten up its standards, adding that he would like to see common standards applied to all the states so avoid disparities

like Michigan, where they test less.

"What is the actual state of the lake? If we have problems, then we need to get to work," he said.